

/970/"Laotian Politeness in Ancient and Modern Times (1)"

1. A talk held on June 18, 1949, under the auspices of the Alliance Francaise in Vientiane.

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An eminent lecturer has said that the Laotian is a humble person. I should like to add that the Laotian is also very polite. If I dared, I would use the past tense! But one should not let oneself be misled by the appearance of the newly arisen cities and the uncertain customs of a generation as yet poorly adjusted, where the old remember the past and where the young believe that much must be destroyed.

That is why the talk that I gave in Laotian on the subject had as much an informative character as an educational one, for I believe that in the era in which we find ourselves it is necessary to help people in making choices and in adjusting themselves. And since we, Frenchmen and Laotians, have been living side by side for more than half a century, we must, in some sort, have an interpretation of French and Laotian customs in order to be able to decide, now in favor of the former, now in favor of the latter.

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What are the marks of respect?--To show his respect to a superior or to an older person, the Laotian salutes with his hands joined together. This manner of salutation must be preserved. The custom of going on all fours in approaching a mandarin will no longer do. It is, in effect, a humiliating posture. When one passes by a superior it is enough to walk softly while inclining the head a little.

The salute in the Laotian or in the French manner marks the respect of one person toward another. It must be reciprocal, but it is up to the subordinate to salute first.

/971/ When one person salutes another with his hands folded together, the latter must answer in the same manner. If he does not answer at all or only makes a sign with his head he must be considered ill-bred.

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After having returned the greeting in the Laotian manner, the superior can shake hands in the European manner in order to show his good will towards the person who respects him.

Some say that to salute in the European fashion is too liberal a

INTRODUCTION TO THE KNOWLEDGE OF LAOS

[2 blank page][3] PREFACE

114 The newcomer to Laos who wishes to interest himself in the country complains that he can find no work capable of satisfying his curiosity. However, many volumes have been published, but these are of unequal value, many being merely a confused collection about well-known places. Unfortunately, they are usually out of print or inaccessible. Having quoted the book by L. de Reinach, *Le Laos*, already rather old, and *L'Histoire du Laos Français* by P. Le Boulanger, one has about exhausted the serious works which are available without too much difficulty.

There exist, however, many well documented articles which provide a precious source of information. Unfortunately they are scattered in periodicals many of which had only a short life or have disappeared without leaving a trace.

121 114 For this reason, at the request of friends from Laos and France, we propose to write this modest introduction to the knowledge of Laos, based principally on the works of our predecessors, making an effort to give the evidence of our research or of our personal experience whenever possible.

However, the speed with which we wish to complete this popular work on Laos has not allowed us to benefit from the results of studies now being made in France. Many points which remain obscure, particularly the origin of certain festivals, will be partially explained in these works. [4] Should one have waited for their publication, fortified with all the critical development of scientific studies? Our need to publish quickly an introductory manual to Laos has obliged us to ignore these works, after having taken the precaution to notify the reader.

Some may be surprised that we do not once mention the mountain people. We have done this intentionally, for these questions can be treated in another volume without affecting the plan of the present one. In any case, it would be desirable for these questions to be studied by an ethnologist.

114 Since the signature of the agreements attached to the general convention of July 19, 1949, the French School of the Far East [Ecole Française d'Extrême Orient, referred to by author as E. F. E. O. -- Translator] anxious to give fresh impetus to research on Laos and thanks to the benevolent understanding of the Royal Government,